

[From Summer 2004]

Assateague Lighthouse Has New Owner

Refuge Manager John D. Schroer announced that ownership of the historic Assateague Island Lighthouse was transferred from the US Coast Guard to the US Fish and Wildlife Service early this year. The National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 authorizes the transfer of historic lighthouses and stations at no cost to federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit corporations and community development organizations for parks and recreation, cultural and historic, and educational uses. According to the Act, part of the transfer requirement includes an agreement for the structure's historic preservation and public access. Although the US Fish and Wildlife Service will be responsible for preserving the structure, the US Coast Guard will continue to maintain the light. The lighthouse's characteristic directional coded beacon, a double flash every five seconds, will remain an active aid to navigation.

The present lighthouse was completed in 1867 and has been a trademark of the area ever since. "Lighthouses are a symbol of hope and perseverance. The Assateague Island Lighthouse has weathered over 100 years of hurricanes and nor'easters, yet still stands strong. The Coast Guard has entrusted Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge with its preservation and we are excited about such an endeavor," said Refuge Manager John Schroer.

The lighthouse, situated on an ancient dune on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, is a main attraction for many history buffs, lighthouse enthusiasts, and visitors wishing to catch a bird's eye view of the beautiful surrounding landscape. In fact, several couples over the past few years have shared their wedding vows at the base of the lighthouse, using its candy striped design as a stunning backdrop. The lighthouse is even featured on the current Federal Duck Stamp.

In partnership with the Chincoteague Natural History Association (CNHA), tours of the Lighthouse will likely begin in early summer. CNHA is seeking volunteers to staff the Lighthouse. A person is needed at the top for visitor assistance and safety, as well as protection of the lamp mechanism. The bottom volunteer ensures that the maximum number of visitors inside the Lighthouse is maintained as well as providing that all important visitor assistance. Four volunteers will be needed each day as the tour of duty will be divided into 3-hour shifts. Volunteering for the CNHA during these tours is a great way for lighthouse buffs to share their love of the Assateague Lighthouse and maritime history. For further information, or to sign up as a volunteer, contact the Chincoteague Natural History Association at 757-336-3696.

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